Winter, 2000 Vol 1, No.2

# Partnership Committee Making Progress

## Industry/Government Group Tackles Environmental Issues on the Farm

The Partnership Committee on Agriculture and the Environment was established in April, 1998 to provide a single-window approach for consultation on environmental issues that affect farmers and agriculture.

The idea was to assemble a senior group of decision-makers from industry and government who could begin to resolve the often difficult issues that impact both agriculture and the environment. Staff from the provincial and federal ministries of Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, together with representatives of the Union of BC Municipalities, meet with representatives of the BC Agriculture Council (BCAC) 4 times a year.

The work of the Partnership Committee and the progress they've made in resolving practical, everyday issues such as ditch maintenance, nutrient management and limiting the damage done to crops by wildlife, are outlined in this newsletter.

"For years, we had been frustrated by the duplication, red-tape and the inconsistencies in policies between various governments and their agencies," commented Niels Holbek, Co - Chair of the Partnership Committee and a Director of the BC Agriculture Council. "The Partnership Committee has provided an opportunity to bring all agencies to the table to work out practical solutions in the best interests of both agriculture and the environment."

"This partnership is a major achievement and an important opportunity for British Columbia. It opens the door for us to bring together two components of a sustainable provincial economy: a thriving agriculture industry, and a clean, healthy, naturally diverse environment," said Joan Sawicki, BC's Minister of Environment, Lands and Parks.

The involvement of the Union of BC Municipalities underscores the importance of including local governments, and the support of local communities, in the resolution to many of these issues.

"The Partnership Committee provides an opportunity for local government representatives to meet face to face with the people who initiate policies and legislation that directly affect farmers," commented Gary Wickham of the District of Chilliwack and a member of the committee.

*Agriculture and the environment: sharing common boundaries*

For example, The Partnership Committee provided input to the committee on mushroom production chaired by MLA John van Dongen. With the adoption of a Farm Bylaw by the Township of Langley last June, a model is now in place that provides clear standards for mushroom composting facilities.

"The Partnership Committee has provided an opportunity to bring all agencies to the table to work out practical solutions in the best interests of both agriculture and the environment," commented Niels Holbek, Co-Chair of the Partnership Committee and a director of the BC Agriculture Council.

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>
> ***Niels Holbek, Co Chair of the Partnership Committee and a director of the BC Agriculture Council.***

"The Partnership Committee must continue to be supported, both by producers and the government, as they tackle some of the really tough issues," says BC Agriculture and Food Minister Corky Evans. "The committee's single-window approach to dealing with environmental issues is helping to reduce red tape and regulations for B.C. farmers. By bringing down barriers, our farmers can gain the confidence they need to do their business well and enable the agri-food sector to grow in a way that is both environmentally and economically sustainable. I thank all the partners for their efforts to work co-operatively to solve these important issues."

For more information on how the Partnership Committee may be able to assist you or your sector please contact:
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### Guiding Principles of the Partnership Committee

1. **Agricultural policies must be developed and practices and industry development conducted in a manner that protects and conserves the environment.**
2. **Environmental protection policies must consider the economic sustainability of agriculture.**
3. **The Committee members commit to seek cooperative, consensus-based solutions.**
4. **The environmental regulatory framework should be fair, consistent and predictable; involving regulations, rules and guidelines developed in a coordinated manner and administered equitably.**
5. **Preventative solutions based on sound stewardship and care for the environment are preferred to approaches that address environmental degradation after the fact.**

## Cranberry Industry Issues Reviewed

Another example of the cooperative approach to addressing environmental issues is taking place in BC's cranberry industry. The Partnership Committee has facilitated a process for government and agency representatives to meet with the cranberry industry to review possible environmental concerns related to cranberry farming.

Ocean Spray, the largest distributor of cranberry products in North America, recently offered producers the opportunity for new and expanded contracts to supply cranberries. As a result of this opportunity, government agencies encountered an increase in the development of cranberry farms in the Lower Mainland. This expansion raised some concerns relating to the potential impact on fish and wildlife habitat, as well as water quantity and quality in streams.

These concerns were presented to the Partnership Committee and it was agreed that Committee representatives would meet with the BC Cranberry Growers Association. After this initial consultation, it was agreed that the growers would cooperate in a formal review of these concerns.

This process is now underway. In the interim period, cranberry growers are working with the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks to set up a discharge-sampling program for cranberry operations. Also during this period, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Canadian Wildlife Service co-funded an independent study of the relationship between fish and wildlife habitat and the development of the cranberry industry in the Fraser Valley and Vancouver Island.

A subcommittee has been established with industry and agency participation to jointly review and analyze this information to determine if further action is warranted and to report back to the Cranberry Working Group.

Steve Torrence, Executive Director of the BC Horticultural Coalition and a member of the subcommittee noted: "This is a good example of how the Partnership Committee can effectively address a matter that concerns in a cooperative manner."

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# A Consensus on Sensitive Streams

With 8 percent of BC salmon stocks extinct or at the brink of extinction, the provincial government is taking action to conserve and restore these threatened fish stocks.

The Fish Protection Act outlines a variety of ways to assist in rebuilding fish populations, including the provision for the provincial government to designate a number of "sensitive streams" throughout the province.



**Sensitive stream designation needs careful monitoring.**

"Government has made it a priority to protect, conserve and restore at-risk fish populations and their habitats," said Environment, Lands and Parks Minister Joan Sawicki. "Designating sensitive streams under the Fish Protection Act is an important step in the process for achieving these goals."

These sensitive streams typically suffer from seasonal low water levels that reduce the numbers of fish returning to spawn.

Recovery plans will be put in place for each sensitive stream in an attempt to increase water levels to more sustainable "fish-friendly" levels.

"Designation provides the opportunity to initiate recovery plans for these streams," stated Dick Roberts, Executive Director of Regional Operations, BC Ministry of Environment Lands and Parks. "Recovery plans can provide benefits for all stakeholders in the stream, including fish and agriculture."

Some agriculture producers have expressed concerns that existing water rights on sensitive streams may be withdrawn and that water for fish will have a priority over other uses. In fact, the designation of a sensitive stream does not authorize the withdrawal of existing water rights, but any new applications for water will be reviewed to determine the impact on fish and fish habitat.

The Partnership Committee on Agriculture and the Environment has been working closely with all government ministries and stakeholder groups to ensure that this sensitive stream policy is implemented with an eye toward the specific and cumulative impact on agriculture.

Recently, an agreement was reached between the BC Agriculture Council (BCAC) and the provincial government that outlines a set of principles in the implementation of this policy. These principles will help ensure the process for dealing with sensitive streams is fair to all parties and the needs of agriculture producers are addressed in the development and implementation of all sensitive stream recovery plans.

Of particular interest to the BCAC and other agricultural groups are the 2 pilot projects, on Kanaka Creek near Haney/Maple Ridge and Campbell River's Black Creek, that will serve as the first sensitive stream recovery plans in the province.

"We will be watching the process closely to minimize the impact of this policy on producers," commented Steve Thomson of the BC Agriculture Council.

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**The criteria for designating a sensitive stream under the Fish Protection Act are:**

- The stream must be in a watershed containing significant at-risk salmon populations.
- The stream must have a high potential for salmon population recovery.
- The stream must be located in an area of the province with sensitive yearly flows and significant human populations or industrial users.
- The flow of the stream must be limited to a degree that prevents fish populations from reaching historical levels.
- Works associated with the diversion or storage of water adversely affects stream flows and fish migration.
- The stream offers good potential for recovery of fish populations.
- The stream is not otherwise being addressed under the BC Hydro Water Use Planning license review process.

# Agriculture Providing Answers in Riparian Areas

British Columbia's fisheries and wildlife resources, together with our provincial agriculture industry are linked together in their reliance on two critical components: water and land. In much of the province, valuable fisheries habitat is situated on or close to private farmland. Recognizing these two sectors must co-exist, the Partnership Committee is working on ways to enhance fisheries, water quality and wildlife resources as well as to facilitate growth and development of the agriculture industry.

***Before**: A stream suffering from poor riparian management.*

The Fish Protection Act requires that riparian protection measures must be implemented on watercourses that are known to be important to fish and their habitat. Agricultural areas are currently exempt from the regulations under the Act, however, there is agreement between the agriculture industry and provincial government agencies that the industry will prepare guidelines and implement a process to manage activities in riparian areas.

A Riparian Working Group established by the Partnership Committee has been tasked to develop the guidelines and implement the process. This group, led by the BC Agriculture Council, is overseeing a contract to develop self-audit procedures for riparian management on watercourses in agricultural areas, along with guidelines for the dairy, beef and horticultural sectors.

In view of the importance of this initiative, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the Ministry of Environment Lands and Parks, Environment Canada's Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative and the Canadian Wildlife Service as well as the industry are providing financial support. All agencies are participating on the Working Group and are committed to developing a process that will meet the objectives of the Fish Protection Act.

Riparian areas are an important component of fish habitat and therefore subject to the habitat provisions of the Federal Fisheries Act. As a result Fisheries and Oceans Canada is actively involved in the development of the self-audit to help ensure that the product will address the needs of all stakeholders.

"Many of our most important fish streams flow through some of the province's prime agricultural land. The challenge is to find ways of protecting and enhancing these fisheries resources while at the same time maximizing the economic potential of our farmlands," said Ron Bertrand, Director of BCMAFs Resource Management Branch. "This project is a critical step in finding approaches to riparian management that meet both the needs of fish and farmers and ranchers."

Significant progress has been achieved. The Working Group is now reviewing draft outlines that include principles, riparian functions, riparian factors for inclusion in the audit process and a self-audit template.

"I am pleased with the progress we are making. We are committed to developing a practical, useful tool that will be utilized by producers to enhance riparian areas on their farms. All parties recognize that a proactive educational approach through this initiative can enhance both agriculture and environment while providing the flexibility to accommodate the unique character of each farm and its watercourses," commented Steve Thomson, BCAC Coordinator and Chair of the Riparian Working Group.

The Ministry of Environment Lands and Parks is encouraged by the progress to date that has been made at the Riparian Working Group in the development of this self-audit document.

"Our main hope and concern would be that this self-audit riparian quality process will be promoted proactively by the agriculture community as a key means for producers to vastly improve the riparian and in-stream quality of many lowland watercourses that contain fish values or enter into streams with high fish values," said Glen Carlson, Regional Habitat Biologist and BCMELP representative on the working group.

George Derksen, Pollution Abatement Coordinator with Environment Canada, commented, "Providing a healthy riparian area is certainly an important means to enhancing wildlife values and measures such as maintaining a vegetative filter strip along a watercourse have been shown to improve water quality. The direction this initiative is taking should benefit wildlife and help improve water quality."

"Due to the important contribution of riparian areas to fish habitat, Fisheries and Oceans Canada has a strong interest in ensuring that the riparian self-audit will clearly communicate good riparian management practices to producers," said Jennifer Nener, Senior Program Biologist. "Having good riparian condition usually benefits both producers and fish. Through our Habitat Conservation and Stewardship Program, we may have Habitat Auxiliaries and other support people available to provide guidance to producers who wish to improve the condition of riparian areas on their farms. These staff can also help form linkages between producers and community groups that can assist with riparian planting and other activities."

***After**: The same stream benefiting from good riparian conditions.*

Over the coming months, the Working Group will be completing the self-audit process and testing it in a number of pilot projects. They will continue to work closely with producer organizations during the implementation of the project.

To find out more about this project please contact:
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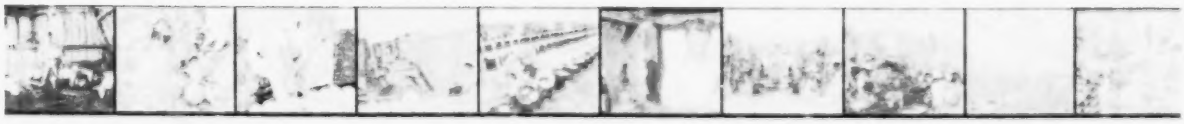

# Action Plan for Nutrient Management Underway

The Lower Fraser Valley is an important area of commercial agricultural production, supporting a wide diversity of commodities that contribute a majority of BC's farm cash receipts. The agriculture industry is the backbone of many communities in this region of the province. One of the major considerations in all Fraser Valley farming operations, regardless of sector or commodity produced, should be the appropriate management of the farm's nutrients.

Agriculture organizations are working proactively with government ministries and agencies to develop a Nutrient Management Action Plan (NMAP) for the Fraser Valley. Through the Agriculture Environment Partnership Committee it was agreed the Fraser Basin Council would facilitate this process.

The development of this plan is being undertaken in response to a series of reports on the Management of Livestock and Poultry Manures in the Lower Fraser Valley 1994-97. Reports 1-9 and as a result of the recognition that there are issues to address. In some areas of the Lower Fraser Valley large nutrient surpluses are resulting in water quality problems that affect both downstream producers, and key populations of coho and chum salmon, and cutthroat trout. While the reports provide an overview of the challenges and opportunities, there is a need for a plan detailing how opportunities to address the issue can be acted upon. The intent of the process is to define the priority actions, the roles and responsibilities of government agencies and agricultural interests, and a timeline for implementation.

The agriculture industry agrees that a proactive and cooperative approach is required, emphasizing that producers must play a key role in developing and implementing the actions, building on many positive initiatives that are already underway and the progress that has been made already. This includes:

- Manure Management Guidelines for all sectors of the industry
- Agriculture Peer Advisory Services
- Sustainable Poultry Farming Group Manure Transportation
- Hog Industry Transition Plan
- Increased Manure Storage Capacity (Investment Agriculture Foundation Program)

*Increased manure storage assists nutrient management planning*

Steve Thomson, Coordinator for the BC Agriculture Council stated, "the industry has made significant progress in addressing nutrient issues. For example manure storage capacity has increased in the past few years and continues to expand, nutrient management guidelines have been prepared in consultation with community groups and have been promoted by them, and we have moved significant quantities of poultry manure out of identified sensitive areas."

The process has three objectives. They are to:

- Address areas where estimated nutrient budgets far exceed the capacity of the land or crop.
- Reduce agriculture sources of pollution to water and land through the adoption of on-farm nutrient management practices in areas where there is sufficient land to assimilate nutrient production.
- Through planning, avoid future imbalances in the amount of nutrients applied to agricultural lands.

"From the perspective of the Fraser Basin Council, we see that farmers want to be more recognized as good stewards of the environment and be economically viable. At the same time, we see that government agencies want measurable progress in addressing issues such as water quality and fish habitat. The Fraser Basin Council believes that farmers and government can build a plan that will help in achieving all of these objectives. The Council is pleased to be working with farmers and government to help in this important work," said Ilona Campagnolo, Chair of the Fraser Basin Council.

Collectively, government agencies and agriculture interests have many of the tools that are needed to manage agricultural nutrients in a more sustainable way. The cooperative approach can strengthen those tools and can provide benefits for agricultural and community interests, while helping the both the environment and the local economy.

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# Ditch Maintenance: Working for Farmers and Fish

We've all read the troubling headlines about the perilous state of BC's salmon stocks. Fisheries closed or curtailed. Jobs have been lost and communities are suffering. Streams that once held thousands of spawning coho and other salmon and trout species now only see a fraction of that annual return.

Often overlooked in those headlines are a growing number of individuals, non-profit groups and governments who are doing their part to reverse this trend. Thousands of British Columbians are taking part in small, local projects to help rehabilitate streams and, together with hatchery and restocking programs, the results are encouraging. And BC farmers are no different.

Over the years, farmers have built ditches to drain their fields – a very common and necessary practice in the operation of a farm. But the maintenance of these ditches has historically been a contentious point as farmers struggled to meet DFO requirements that were often seen as costly constraints to their regular farming practices.

"The regulation and red tape wrapped around ditch maintenance often acted as a disincentive for producers and municipalities to complete this work," says Andy Dolberg, Secretary Manager of the BC Milk Producers Association.

To assist both producers and government agencies, the Partnership Committee on Agriculture and the Environment has recently implemented a Pilot Project for the Lower Fraser Valley on Agricultural Ditch Maintenance Guidelines for Constructed Watercourses.

Understanding how farming practices can affect fish and fish habitat is the first step. Solutions can often be simple and inexpensive. Often, the things that benefit fish and their habitat make for good farming practices as well.

*Pilot project underway for ditch maintenance guidelines.*

"The idea is to find a workable way to maintain watercourses for agricultural irrigation and drainage purposes while protecting their fisheries values," said Ted Van der Gulik, Senior Engineer in BC's Ministry of Agriculture and Food. "We believe there is significant good will on the part of most producers to help British Columbia's fisheries. It's largely a question of education and finding ways that achieve results with the least amount of regulation and red tape."

The pilot project focused on streamlining an approval process for farm ditch maintenance to provide the farmer and the local municipal drainage and dyke authorities with a process to maintain constructed ditches in the best possible way without contravening federal laws.

One area the pilot project focused on was "timing windows" – optimal dates for the maintenance of ditches and watercourses that lessen the impact on fish and their habitat.

"Generally, we are most concerned about impacts in the rainy season when adult salmon are moving into the watercourse to spawn and later in the spring when the eggs are hatching. The young juveniles are very sensitive to any type of disruption to their food source and water quality," said Van der Gulik.

The task group is also examining the benefits of a project that would map all streams, watercourses and ditches in the lower Fraser Valley providing all user groups with better information and planning tools.

"The most important thing to remember is that all our activities are interrelated. What may seem like an insignificant drainage ditch can have a major impact on the habitat in a nearby stream," said Bruce Reid, Habitat Biologist with Fisheries and Oceans Canada Wildlife Committee. Building Bridges and Finding Solutions. "All that must be required to resolve the threat to fish is a little common sense and the cooperation of all parties involved."

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# Wildlife Committee: Building Bridges and Finding Solutions

Crop damage caused by wildlife is a serious problem in many B.C. farms and ranches. From migratory birds in the vegetable fields of the Fraser Valley, to deer in Okanagan orchards, to elk in the hay fields of the Peace River country, wildlife can often wreak havoc on a producer's crop and on his/her livelihood.

Last year, in response to a growing number of producer concerns, the Partnership Committee officially created the BC Agriculture Wildlife Advisory Committee to help facilitate the resolution of a variety of wildlife issues.

"Up until recently, there was no tripartite dialogue between the government, the wildlife agency and the industry. But now we have a process," says Steve Torrence of the BC Horticulture Council. "Through the offices of the Partnership Committee we are able to build bridges to finally achieve resolution on a number of contentious issues."

The problems are often localized says Brian Baehr of the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food and a co-chair of the committee. "Our role is to act as a facilitator and encourage the local communities to work together to find practical, common sense solutions."

Baehr points out that the answer often lies in simply creating a structure for the local community – producers, wildlife groups and all levels of government – to discuss the issue. But governments also need to be prepared to amend a policy or regulation to better fit local needs.

"That's why the Partnership Committee is so important. If we identify some policy or regulation changes that are required at a senior level, we have that linkage. It's the best model we've ever had for resolving some of these difficult issues."

For ranchers in the Peace River, their participation in the Peace Wildlife Committee has resulted in real progress in resolving the growing problem of elk and deer foraging on their fields and haystacks.

"In the Peace Country we are unique because we have a over 8 months of

*In the Peace Country, elk can easily destroy thousands of tons of hay.*

the year. So the pressure on the producer is much heavier because they rely on their crops to feed their cattle for that period of time" commented Andy Ackerman, Regional Fish and Wildlife Manager for the BC Environment Ministry. "If we have a really bad winter elk can easily destroy hundreds of thousands of tons of hay."

The Peace Wildlife Committee is chaired by Peace River Regional District Chair Karen Goodings and is comprised of representatives of the area's major agriculture producers and environmental groups, as well as three provincial ministries. They are examining a number of solutions such as "reactive permits" which allow ranchers and local hunters to selectively cull problem animals. The group is also looking at the benefits of a proposal for a major stockyard fencing program and changes that could be made to range management practices on Crown lands that may help decrease the damage done by elk on private land.

"I believe that Regional Districts should attempt to improve the life for people outside of organized municipal areas," says Goodings. "The ranching community has been looking to resolve this issue for years. The key is finding a solution that everyone can agree on."

BC Agriculture and Food Minister Corky Evans has met with the Peace Wildlife Committee to hear firsthand of the conflicts, and the solutions, regarding wildlife in the area.

"The first step to solving wildlife issues is getting the people at the local and provincial level to talk about the problems," says Evans. "Every region and every situation has its own unique challenges, and I commend the Partnership Committee and the Agriculture Wildlife Advisory Committee for coordinating a strategic approach to problem-solving."

For further information on how the BC Agriculture Wildlife Partnership Committee may be of assistance to you or your producer group, please contact:
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# Manure Storage Program a Success

The Manure Storage Expansion Program, with funding from the BC Investment Agriculture Foundation, has assisted nearly 100 individual farm operators increase the amount of their on-farm manure storage capacity.

The program was first established in 1998 to encourage livestock and poultry producers to increase and improve their farm manure storage capacity. Under the program, producers may receive reimbursement of up to 30% of eligible expenditures to a maximum of $10,000. The program has now approved grants totaling over $700,000 and drawn nearly $5,000,000 in private investment by producers.

In the view of the Foundation the program is meeting its objectives and additional funding of $400,000 was announced for 2000 to continue the program.

Ben Doerksen, Director of the BC Investment Agriculture Foundation commented, "The initial programming achieved or exceeded all expectations and met the goal of improving the environmental health of the province. This is an example of how targeted financial support can lever tremendous investment by individual producers."

Funding for the Manure Storage Program was provided through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development (CARD) Fund.

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**Manure Storage Expansion Program (1998-99)**

Approved Applications: 93

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Dairy | 65 | ($362,623) |
| Poultry | 22 | ($132,392) |
| Hog | 4 | ($34,194) |
| Beef | 2 | ($6,194) |
| Total Approved Grants | | $741,403 |

Total Value of Projects $4,949,553
(Investment by Producers)

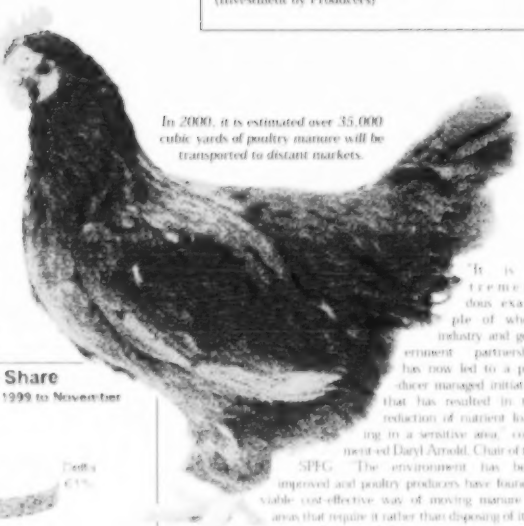
## Poultry Manure: The Short and Long Haul

The Sustainable Poultry Farming Group (SPFG) was established in 1991 as a partnership between industry and government to deal with environmental issues concerning the Fraser Valley poultry industry and the public. In 1993, the SPFG undertook a major initiative: the transport of manure from areas of excess poultry manure production such as the Abbotsford aquifer to areas where little manure is produced and it can be used as a valued resource. The overall goal for the initiative is to deliver the poultry manure to crop producers and ranchers at an affordable price from areas in the Fraser Valley where it was in excess of crop needs.

This manure-handling program, known as the Groundwater Protection Program (GPP), is a producer-led, volunteer program that works in the interests of crop producers and over 430 poultry farms located in the Fraser Valley.

GPP cooperators, who are poultry producers, arrange to ship manure from their farms. A mobile conveyor system has been developed to load the largest of trucks and bulk loads of up to 140 cubic yards are transported from farms to places near and far. The SPFG office assists in the development of these alternate and distant markets and coordinates the shipments of the manure.

Since it modest beginnings, the program has grown in scope. In 2000 it is estimated that over 35,000 cubic yards of poultry manure will be shipped to alternate markets. The SPFG continues to develop new markets and to improve on the efficiency of the program.



*In 2000, it is estimated over 35,000 cubic yards of poultry manure will be transported to distant markets.*

**Distant Market Share**
Manure Shipments from April 1999 to November 1999

"It is a tremendous example of where industry and government partnership has now led to a producer managed initiative that has resulted in the reduction of nutrient loading in a sensitive area," commented Daryl Arnold, Chair of the SPFG. "The environment has been improved and poultry producers have found a viable, cost-effective way of moving manure to areas that require it rather than disposing of it in excess of crop needs."

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